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VIA E-Mail and Chapter Mail

Distribution:

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Government Relations and Social Action E-Alert

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New minister of Health and Long-term Care

Earlier this summer the Government of Ontario underwent a “mini-shuffle”, the result of which saw the Hon. George Smitherman leave his post as minister of Health and Long-Term Care for the newly created position of minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

The Hon. David Caplan was appointed minister of Health and Long-term Care and has held his post for two months. Minister Caplan is the son of Elinor Caplan, a former Ontario minister of Health who later became a federal Member of Parliament and held roles of parliamentary secretary to the minister of Health and then minister of Citizenship and Immigration at the federal level.

Before entering his new health role, David Caplan served as the minister of Public Infrastructure and Renewal and has served in the past as Housing and Municipal Affairs critic while in Opposition. More information on David Caplan can be found at <http://www.ontarioliberal.ca/MemberDetail.aspx?id=200815>.

MS Ambassadors work to endMS

In August and September MS Ambassadors across the province will meet with over 20 MPPs to discuss the need to improve access to home care and housing, age-appropriate long-term care, and drug therapies, as well as to introduce them to the endMS campaign. Thank you to our MS Ambassadors for working in their communities to end MS! If you would like to know about the MS Ambassador Network contact Kim Steele at kim.steele@mssociety.ca.

Increasing care in long-term care facilities

Ontario is providing \$23.3 million to support the creation of 873 personal support worker positions in long-term care homes. This will increase the average paid hours of direct daily care per resident to 3.26 hours for the next year, with an ultimate goal of bringing the direct daily care per resident standard up to 3.5 hours, a position long advocated by the Ontario Long-Term Care Association.

This is the first round of funding to add 2,500 new personal support worker positions and 2,000 more nurses in long-term care homes over the next four years, as announced in the 2008 budget, available at

<http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/english/budget/ontariobudgets/2008/e1a>.

Update on Betaseron and Tysabri

The MS Society's advocacy efforts around access to drug therapies have garnered a win! As of August 28th, Ontarians who have a single attack and lesions in the brain indicative of MS (clinically isolated syndrome) may be able to obtain coverage for Betaseron through the Exceptional Access Program (EAP). Previously, Betaseron was only available through the EAP to qualifying individuals who have relapsing-remitting MS.

Two new cases of PML (progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy) have been confirmed in people who have been treated with Tysabri. According to information from the National MS Society (USA), the occurrence is within the range of the predicted frequency of PML cases, estimated by a published report and by the FDA (US - Food and Drug Administration) of approximately 1 in 1,000 people taking the drug. More information can be found at

http://www.mssociety.ca/en/research/medmmo_20080813_tysabri.htm.

MS Society champions secure incomes

People from across Canada participated in an online campaign aimed at improving income support for people affected by MS. Over 1,000 Canadians – including over 250 Ontarians - wrote their Members of Parliament (MPs) urging them to:

- Make Employment Insurance sickness benefits more flexible so people can work part-time and receive partial benefits.
- Make the Disability Tax Credit refundable.
- Allow spouses to claim the Caregiver Tax Credit – right now this isn't allowed.

Building on this momentum, the MS Society will petition the House of Commons this fall. The petition can be signed at the Ontario Division Fall Conference and Annual General Meeting and will be distributed to MS Society Chapters and Units.

New report on attendant services

The Ontario Community Support Association (OCSA) has released a report on improving access to attendant services in Ontario. The report provides cost comparisons between different care models and makes recommendations on steps the Government of Ontario and Local Health Integration Networks can take to improve community living options for people with disabilities or chronic illnesses. The full report can be found at

<http://www.ocsa.on.ca/PDF/OCSA%20Attendant%20Services%20Report%20Aug%2011-08.pdf>.

Committee to Evaluate Drugs recruiting

The Committee to Evaluate Drugs (CED) is recruiting a new patient member. The CED provides advice to the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care on drug-related matters and makes recommendations to the Executive Officer on the funding of drug products through Ontario's public drug programs. Applications will be accepted until September 15th, 2008.

For more information, please contact Kim Steele at kim.steele@mssociety.ca.

2009 Government Relations Workshop – save the date!

The 2009 Government Relations and Social Action Training Workshop will be held on Saturday, April 4th in Toronto. An additional training workshop will be offered to MS Ambassadors on Sunday, April 5th. More details to follow. Please mark your calendars!

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